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Ministry of Forests and Range

B.C. FIRE SPECIALISTS TO TACKLE AUSTRALIA'S BUSHFIRES

VICTORIA – British Columbia is sending 52 forest fire specialists to Australia to help respond to bushfires that have burned over 30 homes and a ski lodge in the State of Victoria, announced Forests and Range Minister Rich Coleman today.

"This is the first time that we have deployed such a large number of our forest fire specialists outside North America," said Coleman. "Both British Columbia and Australia are among the most fire-prone environments in the world, so it's helpful for us to share both our expertise and our resources in times of emergency."

The fire specialists will be flying from Vancouver to Melbourne on Jan. 5. Crews will be assisting their counterparts with the State of Victoria's Department of Sustainability and Environment and Country Fire Authority, who need relief due to an early and extreme start to Australia's fire season.

The majority of staff being deployed are planning and operational specialists, including fire behaviour analysts, supervisors and incident commanders. Eight firefighters and a number of information officers have also been requested by Australian officials. Staff will be deployed until mid-February.

The State of Victoria has lost more than 870,000 hectares to wildland fire, with structures lost in both the states of Tasmania and Victoria.

The costs of the deployment are being paid by Australia, under the terms of a co-operation agreement recently signed by B.C. and the Australian wildland firefighting agencies. B.C. has been sharing its knowledge and expertise with Australia for over 10 years as part of its global co-operation efforts.

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